

the global COVAX vaccine effort, and he allocated significant funding toward global vaccination efforts, funding that is expanded under the American Rescue Plan, which we passed just a few weeks ago in the Senate.

Secretary of the Treasury Janet Yellen recently announced that the United States will support the issuance of special drawing rights, a type of IMF foreign exchange reserve that can help poor countries buy vaccines and weather the economic fallout from the pandemic, a welcome move that I encouraged and was a coauthor of with Senator SANDERS and Congressman "CHUY" GARCÍA.

Just last week, the President announced a partnership with key allies in the Pacific region to provide at least 1 billion COVID vaccines in countries in Asia. This is prescient, global leadership long overdue. The President's actions will save lives here at home and abroad, and these investments will fuel a global economic recovery, which we all want to see.

To understand why a global strategy is called for, look at history. Some of you who are witnessing this statement on the floor at home may be old enough to have a distinct circular scar on your upper arm. Maybe you have seen it on the arms of a parent or grandparent. That mark is a relic from one of the world's greatest public health victories: the eradication of the deadly smallpox virus.

The fact that so few people living today remember the death and misery caused by that disease is a testament to the global public health strategy that stopped it. Smallpox was one of the most devastating diseases to afflict mankind. It is estimated to have killed up to 300 million people in the 20th century, 500 million people in the last hundred years.

In 1967, the World Health Organization launched a historic international effort to eradicate it. It was one of the most successful public health initiatives in human history. Next month marks the 41st anniversary of that historic achievement.

In the years since, America has led similar global efforts to stamp out diseases like polio and Ebola. If we follow in these footsteps, historians will one day add COVID to the top of that list of historic achievements.

Pursuing a global strategy is the most effective way—maybe the only way—to accelerate vaccine production and distribution in every corner of the world. By sharing our wealth of knowledge and resources with the world, we reap lifesaving benefits, not just around the world but right here at home.

We all know public health is bigger than partisanship and always has been. In the 2000s, for example, I called on then-President Bush to help stem the scourge of AIDS around the world through the historic PEPFAR Program. At the time, many of my Republican friends in the Senate supported

it. I hope and expect that they will do the same when it comes to supporting the global effort against COVID-19. The moment calls for nothing less.

Public health experts understand that. President Biden understands that. I know we here in Congress understand that. We can end the threat of COVID once and for all. It is within our power.

#### UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

Mr. President, let me start this statement by saying I am a fan of the U.S. Postal Service. I have been throughout my life. I believe the men and women who make the Postal Service work do a great service to this country and distinguish us from many countries in the world that don't have anything near our service or reliability in delivering the mail. Having said that, and believe it to my inner being, the Postal Service needs to take a hard look at what is going on within their ranks today.

Last month, the U.S. Postal Service Great Lakes area sent out the postal equivalent of an SOS. It put out the call to mail carriers in five surrounding States asking for letter carriers to come to my State of Illinois to help deliver a huge backlog of undelivered mail. It also called for mail carriers to help deliver Chicago's mail on Sundays.

Ken Labbe is one of the mail carriers who answered that call for help. Mr. Labbe has been a mail carrier in Mount Prospect, IL, just outside of Chicago, for 28 years. He is the president of the local letter carriers union. He is also quite an athlete. In 2002, he was the only male mail carrier on the USPS-sponsored professional cycling team.

He volunteered for the last Sunday in February. He figured he had the knowledge and endurance to help reduce the mail backlog that had plagued the Postal Service in Chicago. What he discovered, he said, stunned him. At every home he delivered to, he stuffed 20 to 30 pieces of mail in the mailbox. He worked 12 hours on that Sunday, from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., sunup to sundown, without a break, even for lunch. Still, he couldn't complete the assigned workload; the sheer volume of backlogged mail was too great. Inside the local post office, Ken said, he found packages stacked everywhere. Some appeared to have been there for a month or more. The entire situation looked, in his words, "like an episode of 'Extreme Hoarders.'" "A crisis."

Chicagoland is not the only postal chaos location. Nearly 9 months after a new Postmaster General unveiled his surprise reorganization plan, postal service in much of the Nation is erratic. Delays are longer than ever.

The delivery times have shrunk to historic lows since Louis DeJoy took over last June. At the end of December, the Agency had an on-time rate of 38 percent for nonlocal mail. What was it 1 year earlier? Ninety-two percent. A 92-percent on-time rate descended to 38 percent under Postmaster General DeJoy.

Before Louis DeJoy took over, 91 percent of Postal Service customers gave USPS high marks—one of the highest approval ratings of any government Agency. Today, postal customers across America—certainly in my State of Illinois—customers wait anxiously for important checks and bills that arrive weeks late, if at all. They check tracking websites to search for delayed packages, only to read that the package is "out for delivery."

In some neighborhoods in Chicago, residents have given up hope of receiving mail at home. They stand in line for hours at the local post office to try to retrieve their mail themselves. Often, even that doesn't work.

Tracey Otis is one of those people. One day last month, she was one of 40 customers—40—waiting in line at the Postal Service station in the Gresham neighborhood on the South Side of Chicago. Ms. Otis hadn't had regular mail delivery since Christmas. She waited in line for hours, hoping to retrieve a package of diabetic test strips before her current supply ran out. She told a Chicago Sun-Times reporter that she would volunteer to sort the mail if it would help. She went home empty-handed that day, still not sure where her package was or when, if ever, she might see it.

Last month, my staff in Chicago estimated that there might be 300 pieces of mail sitting undelivered in four Chicago postal facilities. We based that on the number of complaints we received in our office. After that, the Postal Inspector General released a report that showed we were wrong. There weren't 300 letters in postal limbo in these facilities; there were 19,000 undelivered pieces of mail in those four facilities.

Since then, in my State, the chaos has stretched way beyond Chicago. We hear from all over the State: Springfield, Champaign-Urbana, Belleville, East St. Louis, Quincy, Peoria, the Quad Cities, and Rockford. These delays in Illinois and across America are causing real hardship for tens of millions of Americans waiting for mail delivery. Patients and pharmacists complain about late medication. People are getting dinged for late mortgage and utility payments and forced to pay late fees. Insurance policies are being canceled because of late payments. Small business owners are forced to wait weeks or months for payments. Others are flooded with calls and emails from customers wondering where their packages are—a good way to lose business.

Who is Louis DeJoy, the mastermind of this mess? Did he come through the ranks of the Postal Service, like four Postmasters General before him? No. His qualifications? He is a former logistics executive who donated millions of dollars to Donald Trump and the Republicans—no experience working at the Postal Service before Donald Trump tapped him to head this Agency last June.

One month later, in the middle of a pandemic that turned postal deliveries

into a lifeline for many, Mr. DeJoy unveiled a radical plan to reorganize the Postal Service, after only 1 month in the job and no experience in the Department. He slashed overtime hours, prohibited late and extra mail delivery trips, and set stricter delivery schedules.

In August, with no public explanation, the Postal Service began removing mail-sorting machines from postal facilities around the country, reducing their ability to process mail. Amazingly, the Postal Service Inspector General determined that the changes were ordered with no analysis and no understanding of how they might affect timeliness of mail delivery. A Federal lawsuit forced the Agency to put the changes on hold until after the election.

On February 6, Mr. DeJoy was quoted in the Washington Post saying that his new plan for reorganizing the Postal Service would be ready for public release "as early as next week." He said that on February 6. We are still waiting for it, waiting for the DeJoy plan to shape up the Postal Service. It is like waiting for a lost package.

We know some of the biggest changes he intends to propose because he has confirmed them publicly. The DeJoy plan for shaping up the post office is expected to call for the following: more service cuts, higher prices, and slower mail delivery. If that sounds like a winning combination to you, I have some vintage computers to sell to your business. In short, this is not a solution; this is sabotage of an essential public service, and we shouldn't tolerate it.

Well, America has a new President who understands that affordable, efficient postal service is essential to America. Five days after taking office, President Biden replaced the Chair of the Postal Regulatory Commission. Late last month, he filled three vacancies of the Postal Service Board of Governors, the body that hires the Postmaster General and oversees the Postal Service.

I encourage President Biden to make all the changes necessary to rescue the Postal Service. Mr. DeJoy has offered a stream of excuses for the chaos that has fallen the Postal Service since he showed up. He says it is the pandemic, the Christmas holidays, bad weather, an election that saw a record number of Americans vote by mail. He has a list as long as your arm.

I would remind him that in 1864, we held a national election in the middle of a Civil War, and 150,000 Union Army troops voted absentee from the field. The Postal Service is as old as America itself. It has proven that it can adapt to crises with the right leadership. If Mr. DeJoy cannot or will not provide that leadership, I respectfully suggest he step down.

I yield the floor.

Mr. LEAHY. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### NOMINATION OF ISABELLA CASILLAS GUZMAN

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, I rise in support of Isabella Guzman, currently the director of California's Office of the Small Business Advocate—the Presiding Officer's State—to be the Administrator of the U.S. Small Business Administration.

We all know the importance of small businesses and how they have been hit so hard during this pandemic. Small businesses employ nearly half of all private sector workers and make outsized contributions to the innovation that makes America's economy strong. Yet the coronavirus has put millions of people out of business, hundreds of thousands of these mom-and-pop, brick-and-mortar retail shops out of business, and restaurants out of business.

We are so pleased that there is, as we say in Minnesota, a lighthouse that we are looking to now. I was up in Duluth on Sunday, and instead of the light at the end of the tunnel, which so many of us talk about with regard to the end of this pandemic, the mayor there referred to it as a lighthouse, for they have a lot of lighthouses on Lake Superior. The end of this pandemic is our lighthouse. We see the blinking lights from a distance, but we know we are not there yet. To get there, we not only need to get this vaccine to every person—and the President has said we will have vaccines available by the end of May for every adult in America—but we have to get it distributed, and our pandemic bill certainly is going to be a major step toward getting that done.

We also need to get our business economy back in order. We need to be able to not be so far down in the ground that we can't climb out of where we are. That is why having Ms. Guzman in place—someone with her record and her ability to lead and who served as the Deputy Chief of Staff and as the Senior Adviser at the Small Business Administration during the Obama administration—is so important.

She will oversee the Paycheck Protection Program, which we established on a bipartisan basis in March of 2020 as part of the CARES Act, as she understands the need for greater equity in loan distribution and has shown a commitment to transparency and accurate loan data. She has made clear that she will make the Paycheck Protection Program more accessible to businesses that have traditionally not had access to the banking relationships needed to secure loans and grants.

Very significantly to me and to those of us who worked on the Save our Stages bill, including Senator CORNYN of Texas, who led the bill with me, she has made clear that she will move on

the grant program immediately. We have been working with the staff there, and we have given these venues that have been shuttered—the first to close and the last to reopen—the ability to access PPP loans, which is really important right now. We also want to get the grant program out immediately—get that money out—and distribute over \$16 billion in grants. Our venues can't wait. They need that relief. Ms. Guzman will be key to leading our way out of this and helping Senator SCHUMER with his theaters in New York to the Fargo Theatre in North Dakota. We need to get this done.

We just passed restaurant relief as part of the American Rescue Plan—a major, major bill—with the \$28.6 billion Restaurant Revitalization Fund, which is going to be so key. I was at The Block Food & Drink restaurant in Saint Louis Park on Sunday and then headed up to Duluth, to the Boat Club, with the mayor and the owners of the Boat Club. There were stories I heard of servers who had been laid off, then came back, laid off, then came back, and there were stories I heard about the owners of some of these restaurants in their taking out repeated loans. They are hanging in there, and we need to have their backs.

One out of six restaurants in this country has permanently closed down during the pandemic. As the leader of the antitrust subcommittee in the Senate, we don't want to just give all of our food service and action in the restaurant area to the big guys. We are pleased we have successful restaurant chains in this country, but that can't be the only thing we have. That is why helping these smaller venues is so important.

Ms. Guzman gets that. She is a lifelong proponent of small businesses and is the daughter of a small business owner. As a former entrepreneur, this makes her the right person for this job at a pivotal time in the life of our country. She has the backing of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and numerous trade organizations. I know her leadership at the SBA will put our struggling businesses in the best hands.

I ask my colleagues to support the nomination of Isabella Guzman to be Administrator of the Small Business Administration. The Presiding Officer must be proud to have someone who has done such good work in California in this job. We are excited about her and what she can do.

#### NOMINATION OF XAVIER BECERRA

Mr. President, today, I rise to speak in support of Xavier Becerra's nomination to serve as Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS).

Attorney General Becerra will bring a fresh perspective to HHS at a critical time during this pandemic. While there is light at the end of the tunnel with the distribution of the coronavirus vaccines, there is still work to do to end this pandemic and put our country on a road to recovery, and that is where Attorney General Becerra's leadership will be crucial.